

VZCZCXRO0678  
OO RUEHROV  
DE RUEHTV #0029/01 0061655  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 061655Z JAN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9895  
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 7904

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000029

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/06/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PINR](#) [KWBG](#) [PINS](#) [MOPS](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: GAZA SITUATION REPORT, JANUARY 6, 1800

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

11. (S//NF) SUMMARY: Israel continues to press forward intensely with Operation Cast Lead while Israeli officials rebuff diplomatic entreaties to enter into a short-term cease-fire with Hamas that would restore the status quo ante. Prime Minister Olmert reiterated Israel's demands that Hamas cease rocket fire and smuggling, but he pledged to meet Gaza's humanitarian requirements. Israel's air and ground campaign continued, with Israel encircling population centers in an effort to force Hamas to accede to Israel's demands. Press reports as of 1700 local gave conflicting casualty tolls of Palestinians killed in the past 24 hours, ranging from two dozen to closer to 50. The discrepancy was primarily due to the afternoon strike on an UNRWA school in which the casualty count remains unclear. Four Israeli soldiers died overnight as a result of friendly fire, bringing Israeli military deaths to five since the operation began. Thirt-three rockets struck Israel as of 1300 local, including one in Gedera - less than 30 miles from Tel Aviv. Approximately 50 trucks on January 6 transited the Kerem Shalom crossing, while the fuel depot at Nahal Oz also was open. On the northern border, Israel remains concerned that Hizballah might try to open a second front. Israeli warplanes reportedly flew over Lebanon, while Hizballah reportedly went on a heightened state of alert "for defensive purposes." End Summary.

-----  
Political and Diplomatic Developments  
-----

12. (U) Israeli leaders remain united and focused on continuing military operations in the Gaza Strip. Prime Minister Olmert this morning rejected a European Union request for a 48-hour cease fire, though he pledged to uphold Israel's commitment to provide basic foodstuffs and medicines to the residents of Gaza. In his January 6 meeting with European foreign ministers, Olmert asked them to support a regional initiative that would see Egypt take control over the Philadelphi corridor so as to prevent arms from reaching Gaza. Foreign Minister Livni continues to characterize the conflict as a larger struggle pitting Israel and the world against the Iran-Hizballah-Hamas axis. She said on January 5 in a press conference that Israel would insist on achieving its goals -- "halting rocket fire and terror from Gaza, stopping the smuggling into the Gaza Strip, and international supervision (of smuggling routes) -- and she downplayed prospects for a negotiated settlement with Hamas by saying that "a necessary war on terror does not end with an agreement." Livni also canceled a trip to New York to discuss diplomatic initiatives in the UN. Meanwhile, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, commenting on reports of Israeli military casualties the evening of January 5, said that Israeli leaders knew the battles would be difficult and would exact costs on Israelis, but that the battle was inevitable.

13. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Sultanov's January 4-5 visit to Israel was focused on exchanging ideas and not discussing any particular plan for a cease-fire, according to

Russian Embassy contacts. Sultanov met with various foreign ministry officials including Livni, Director General Aharon Abramovitch and Deputy Director General for Political Research Nimrod Barkan, all of whom explained to him that Israel would not accept a cease-fire that restored the status quo ante. Livni instead requested from Sultanov that he help slow the diplomatic maneuverings at the UNSC. The MFA officials also complained to Sultanov that Egypt and the Arab world was playing a double game by publicly criticizing Israel while privately rooting for Hamas to be destroyed. Sultanov reportedly repeated Russia's position that there should be an immediate cease-fire on both sides that opens room for negotiations, but did not carry any specifics or press for that outcome. Sultanov is traveling to Syria on January 6 and hopes to meet with Khaled Mesha'al to determine whether there is room for compromise, and then he may return to Israel on January 7, according to the Russian Embassy.

-----  
Military Update  
-----

¶4. (S) Israeli military officials on January 5 told the USDAO that the main effort in the south was during the air campaign when the Israeli Air Force attacked over 300 tunnels with JDAM 2000 pound bombs every 50 meters along the Philadelphi corridor. They explained that the next phase of the attack in the north was to begin tightening the noose on population centers in the vicinity of Gaza City and Jabaliya Camp -- which Israeli forces already have been doing -- and create sufficient pressure on Hamas so that it decides for itself that it was time to stop firing rockets at Israel and

TEL AVIV 00000029 002 OF 002

negotiate a settlement.

¶5. (SBU) To date, five Israeli soldiers have died in operations, including four who were killed in friendly fire incidents in the past 24 hours. In the first incident, three Israeli soldiers died Monday night when an Israeli tank fired a shell at the building they were resting in. Israeli officials announced Tuesday that the fourth soldier was killed in the northern Gaza Strip, with friendly fire also likely to blame. Palestinian sources in Gaza reported that at least 25 people had been killed on Tuesday. Three of those were killed when an Israeli missile struck an elementary school in Gaza City that was being used as a United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) shelter. Some 2000-3000 tons of food were also destroyed. Numerous press reports at 1700 local on January 6 indicated that Israeli fire-from an unverified source-struck an UNRWA school and killed between 10 and 40 Palestinians who had been among hundreds who had sought shelter there.

¶6. (U) Other military developments included:

- foreign journalists continue to be barred from entering the Gaza Strip;
- Israel arrested at least 80 Palestinians throughout Gaza in the past 24 hours; and,
- Israeli media reported at least 33 rockets had been fired into Israel on January 6 as of 1300 local, including one that landed in Gedera - less than 30 km south of Tel Aviv.

-----  
Humanitarian Developments  
-----

¶7. (C) Kerem Shalom was open on January 6, with approximately 50 trucks making the crossing. USAID's Gaza staff reported that Nahal Oz crossing was open, though no fuel had been transferred as of 1200 local. The 200,000 liters of industrial diesel for the Gaza power plant, along with 47 tons of cooking gas and 100,000 liters of diesel for UNRWA that were transferred the previous day were only picked up on the Palestinian side on January 6 due to security

concerns. Trucks did not enter through the Rafah crossing on January 5, and the Karni crossing has remained closed since December 26. For the week of December 28, 2008 to January 3, 2009, 314 truckloads of humanitarian goods were imported into Gaza, according to UN and Oxfam figures. Israeli officials ave set up a humanitarian assistance coordination ell that will include representatives from all o the international organizations operating in Gaz. It will be headed by Gen. Baruch Spiegel (Res) and will be based in a northern suburb of Tel viv.

-----  
Northern Border  
-----

18. (U) Media outlets in Lebanon reported that Israeli jets flew over southern Lebanon. Hizballah also reportedly raised its alert level, with a Lebanese source quoted as saying that the group is determined "not to give Israel a chance to avenge its defeat in the July 2006 war and has therefore raised its alert level for defensive purposes." The press report went on to state that the Lebanese army was working closely with UNIFIL to make sure that no "element" uses southern Lebanon to fire rockets toward Israel.

10. (S//NF) Israel remains very concerned that Hizballah will use Israel's preoccupation with Gaza to attack Israel because of Israel's perceived responsibility for the February 12 2008 killing of Hizballah leader Imad Mugniyah and to show they will not remain idle while Israel attacks Gaza. On January 5, Aiman Mansour, Director of Foreign Policy of Lebanon and Syria at the Israeli National Security Council repeated to Poloffs the assessment that Hizballah is unlikely to launch a direct attack on Israel for fear of a strong response, but will instead either attack targets abroad or allow Palestinian terror groups to launch rockets against Israel. Mansour added that Israel has considered the possibility that Hizballah and Syria would use the war as a distraction to transfer advanced anti-aircraft systems to Hizballah. Mansour described this as an absolute redline.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>  
\*\*\*\*\*  
CUNNINGHAM